United Nations

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ UNPROFOR reports reduced tension in Sarajevo after Bosnian Serbs return weapons seized from Ilizda collection point on Friday; UNHCR set to resume airlift into city tomorrow.

+ UNHCR says number of Rwandan refugees returning home from Zaire has declined from 15,000 to 10,000 a day; cholera epidemic wanes in Goma.

+ France says Operation Turquoise has established secure conditions in Rwanda safe zone; but is not large enough to meet all humanitarian needs.

+ Committee on Racial Discrimination expresses alarm at suffering and deprivation in Rwanda area; says international efforts to prevent genocide were unforgivably late.

+ Security Council mission to Mozambique has talks with Foreign Minister; will meet tomorrow with President Chissano, President of RENAMO, and Chairman of National Election Commission.

+ Special Representative for Somalia expresses concern at recent attack on UNOSOM II and faction fighting in Belet Weyn; reminds Somalis that Security Council is reviewing United Nations role in their country.

+ WHO Director-General, addressing International AIDS Conference in Yokohama, urges Asian leaders to make AIDS prevention a national priority.

+ United Nations Technical Team in Mexico outlines criteria for quick count in 21 August presidential election.

+ ESCAP Executive Secretary Rafeeuddin Ahmed appointed as Associate Administrator of UNDP.

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There was a reduction in tension in the Sarajevo area over the weekend after Bosnian Serb forces returned the heavy weapons which they had forcibly removed from the Ilizda collection point on Friday, according to a United

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Nations spokesman. Responding to a request by the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) launched limited air attacks on Bosnian Serb positions after the weapons were seized. UNPROFOR said it had sought to avoid collateral damage, and had limited the NATO response to a measured and proportionate action.

No sniping incidents were reported in Sarajevo yesterday and tram services resumed, the spokesman said. UNPROFOR positioned several armoured personnel carriers around the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo to protect the trams, and peace-keepers carried out anti-sniper patrols. Meanwhile, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was scheduled to resume its airlift into the city tomorrow.

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The number of Rwandan refugees returning home from Zaire has declined in the last week from 15,000 to 10,000 a day, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). A total of 100,000 people have gone back to Rwanda in recent weeks. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations have been distributing supplies and have set up medical stations along the Goma-Gisenyi-Ruhengeri-Kigali route in order to assist returnees.

Meanwhile, the worst of the cholera epidemic appears to have passed at the Goma refugee camp in Zaire, although dysentry is on the increase, the UNHCR said. An estimated 23,000 people have died in the camp to date.

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France has said that Operation Turquoise is not large enough to cope with the massive flow of refugees into the safe humanitarian zone in southwestern Rwanda. In a letter to the Security Council dated 4 August, it said the French-led force could only provide basic aid for the most urgent cases until long-awaited international assistance became available. However, the force had successfully ensured the security of the area assigned to it and had helped more than two million people.

Despite the relative calm, French soldiers had directly observed flagrant human rights violations in the zone, according to the letter. Information regarding such abuses would be forwarded to the Commission of Experts authorized by the Security Council to investigate human rights violations in Rwanda.

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The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed concern and alarm at the suffering and deprivation in the area of Rwanda. In a consensus decision adopted last week, the Committee also expressed profound regret that international efforts to prevent the tragedy and genocide there had been "so unforgivably late".

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Introducing the decision, Vice-Chairman Michael Sherifis said it indicated the Committee's desire to ensure that gross and massive manifestations of racial discrimination and ethnic conflict did not recur. He noted that Rwanda had been a State party to the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination since May 1975.

The Committee held an exchange of views on the basis of reports on Rwanda submitted by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, R. Degni-Segui, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, José Ayala Lasso. Some members called for more early warning information in such situations and requested an information meeting with the Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

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The Security Council mission to Mozambique met today with the country's Foreign Minister, Pascoal Mocumbi, and was due to have meetings tomorrow with President Joaquim Chissano, Mozambique National Resistence Movement (RENAMO) President Afonso Dhlakama, and the Chairman of the National Election Commission, B. Mazula.

Mission Chairman Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria) said the purpose of the meetings was to underline that all outstanding issues of the General Peace Agreement must be fully implemented and on time. All forces must be demobilized by 15 August, and the October elections must proceed as scheduled.

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The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Victor Gbeho, has expressed grave concern at recent faction fighting in Belet Weyn. In a statement issued on Saturday, he called on the parties concerned to cooperate fully with the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II), to resolve their differences peacefully, and to refrain from any action that might aggravate the situation.

Mr. Gbeho said such actions as the killing of a Zimbabwean soldier and the looting of a UNOSOM II camp in Belet Weyn on 30 July did not favour Somalia's interests at a time when the Security Council was reviewing the United Nations role in the country. All Somali leaders must cooperate with the Operation to ensure the successful implementation of its mandate.

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Fear, indifference and denial have been the main enemies to effective HIV/AIDS prevention according to Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). Addressing the opening of the Tenth International Conference on AIDS in Yokohama, Japan, yesterday, Dr. Nakajima said there was sufficient knowledge about HIV/AIDS to contain its spread. He appealed to Asian leaders to face reality and make AIDS prevention a national priority. With delegates from 128 countries, the Conference is focusing on the rapidly increasing AIDS epidemic affecting Asia and women.

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Dr. Nakajima stressed that the Conference could play a crucial role in mobilizing the political, financial and social support needed for a global AIDS strategy. Enormous population movements, the inferior status of women and a reluctance to acknowledge the huge threat posed by AIDS made many Asian countries very vulnerable. According to the WHO, the disease may be spreading fastest in parts of Asia, where 10 million people could be infected by the year 2,000.

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The United Nations Technical Team in Mexico (ETONU-MEX) today outlined the criteria for conducting a quick count of the results of the presidential election on 21 August. The Team is in Mexico to give local non-governmental organizations technical support with the count, drawing on United Nations experience with electoral assistance missions in almost 50 countries. It will not evaluate or comment on the elections themselves or on the outcome.

The quick count is used to forecast election results. Its success depends on three factors that need to be clearly defined: the scientific design of the sample to be used, with an indication of the margin of error; the availability of observers; and the system of data collection and transmission from polling stations to the processing centre.

In order to qualify for assistance, non-governmental organizations must meet requirements such as impartiality, pluralism, professionalism and transparency. Observation activities should cover the entire electoral process and not be restricted to election day, and coverage should be sufficiently representative for findings to be relevant.

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The Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), James Gustave Speth, has appointed Rafeeuddin Ahmed as Associate Administrator of the UNDP. Mr. Ahmed has been Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) since April 1992. He previously served as Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs and as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Humanitarian Affairs in South-East Asia.

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